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SUBJECT: MEDIA PLAY: (June 7) Tokyo Conference; Colombo

1. Summary. The Sri Lankan media continued its feverish coverage of whether or not the Tigers will go to Tokyo. The LTTE's Tamilchelvam said that if the Tigers' request for an interim administration is met, they might yet go to Japan. Tamil newspaper headlines buzzed with Minister Moragoda's pre-departure reassurances that the Tigers will not be forgotten after Tokyo, and were full of GSL and US exhortations urging the LTTE to attend the donor conference. English and vernacular press reported that Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe is optimistic the LTTE will return to the negotiating table. An editorial in the nationalist-leaning daily the ISLAND asked, "Can mighty nations be blackmailed?" and answered that the Tigers' absence from Tokyo, "Is an attempt to intimidate the 'international community' involved as well as the Sri Lanka government and make the 'peace process' wag according to their dictates." End summary.

2. LTTE statements and other Tamil reaction.

In English and vernacular newscasts, state-owned SLRC television reported on an LTTE press conference in Kilinochchi. LTTE political wing leader Tamilchelvam said the LTTE has not given up on the idea of attending the Tokyo Conference. He stated that if the Tigers receive a favorable reply from the government for their request to administer development and rehabilitation work in the north and east, they would attend. He also noted that there are two more days for this decision to be made, and that whatever situation arises, the LTTE will not revert to war.

Tamil newspaper headlines buzzed with Minister Moragoda's pre-departure reassurances that the Tigers will not be forgotten after Tokyo. LTTE-leaning SUDAR OLI quoted him, "We will not undervalue the cooperation of the Tigers in the development work in NE, [even] though [they are] not attending the Tokyo Conference," while State-owned THINAKARAN added, "Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe will explain at the Tokyo Conference how we will utilize foreign aid - We will not betray the Tigers." Moragoda's comfort continued with independent daily VIRAKESARI's headline, "Peace efforts to be carried forward with new energy after the Conference."

Tamil dailies also sang with GSL and US exhortations urging the Tigers to go to Tokyo. LTTE-leaning SUDAR OLI quoted Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, "I am anxious to see the Tigers at the Tokyo Conference." All major Tamil dailies focused on USAID Deputy Administrator Fred Schieck's 6/6 comments in Colombo. State-owned daily THINAKARAN quoted Schieck, "US hopeful Tigers will attend Tokyo Conference," while independent daily VIRAKESARI continued, "Big loss to the Tamil people if the Tigers do not attend the Tokyo Conference - There's time until tomorrow."

Pro-LTTE website Tamilnet headlined, "Colombo JVP demonstration attracts more than 10,000," and continued, "More than ten-thousand members and activists, including parliamentary members of the Sinhala nationalist party, the Janata Vimukti Peramuna (JVP), took part in a massive rally in Sri Lanka's capital Colombo, Friday afternoon, protesting against attempts by the Sri Lanka government to hand over Northeast interim administration to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), political sources in Colombo said."

Tamil editorialists were silent.

3. GSL statements and pro-government reaction

Various media outlets in Sri Lanka picked up a BBC Asia Today interview with Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe. BBC online reported, "Sri Lanka's prime minister says he has no doubt that Tamil Tiger rebels are committed to peace and that direct talks with the government will resume."

Vernacular and English newscasts on state-owned SLRC television echoed the BBC and reported that Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe is optimistic the LTTE will return to

the negotiating table. SLRC also covered Minister Moragoda's airport reassurances to the Tigers - that the GSL is not underestimating LTTE participation in development of the north and east, and that the GSL wants to solve problems with the LTTE through discussion. Moragoda noted the GSL's desire to proceed with development work in the north and east at a faster pace after the Tokyo conference.

Like the Tamil press, English and Sinhala newspapers also concentrated on GSL and US statements encouraging the LTTE to go to Tokyo. Independent English DAILY MIRROR headlined, "Direct talks will resume soon, Tokyo a turning point: PM." State-owned Sinhala daily DINAMINA offered, "US expresses hope that LTTE will go to Japan," while independent Sinhala daily LANKADEEPA went a step further, "America Warns LTTE - 'Wrong signal to the world by boycotting Tokyo confab.'"

There were no pro-government editorials.

4. Opposition statements and pro-opposition reaction.

Independent television station MTV reported that Lakshman Kadirgamar, Presidential Advisor on International Affairs and Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, hopes that there will be another chance for the UNF and the PA to find a common approach to solve the ethnic conflict after the Tokyo conference.

One newspaper sympathetic to the opposition editorialized. The ISLAND (independent, but nationalist-leaning English daily) asked, "Can mighty nations be blackmailed?" and answered, "The threat to keep off [the Tokyo Conference] is an attempt to intimidate the "international community" involved as well as the Sri Lanka government and make the "peace process" wag according to their dictates."

Block quotes:

"The decision to go ahead with the Tokyo Conference with or without the participation of the LTTE will be proved correct in the long run.

"Neither the LTTE nor the Tamil community stand to gain by keeping off Tokyo. It will aggravate the suffering of the people of the north and east. The threat to keep off is an attempt to intimidate the "international community" involved as well as the Sri Lanka government and make the "peace process" wag according to their dictates.

"The fault lies with the Sri Lanka government. They pampered the terrorists and gave in to practically every demand while looking away from gross violations of the law and the cease-fire agreement. At some stage, some of our enthusiastic peace negotiators were anxious to confer on the LTTE the same status as that of the Sri Lanka government. And that is what appears to figure in the background of demands that are being made.

"It is quite apparent that the indulgent attitudes of the Prime Minister and the international community have encouraged the LTTE to go ahead with bulldozing tactics. Such bulldozing is no way to peace and the LTTE have to be made to realize that. Peace is a two-way process.

"The LTTE most probably will be having its own unorthodox plans if they do not turn up at Tokyo. Whether such plans are to go back to the gun and the bomb or not, it is time that this childish and petulant behavior has to be called to a halt.

"This group of terrorists should be told that they cannot blackmail mighty nations."

End block quotes.

AMSELEM